Reuters Health Information

**School Nurses Save Money: Study**

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NEW YORK (Reuters Health) - A Massachusetts program that put full-time registered nurses in schools more than paid for itself by averting medical costs and lost work for parents and teachers, according to a new study.

Many school districts have cut or reduced the hours of school nurses in recent years, and nationwide less than half of public schools have a full-time nurse, the authors of the report note.

They say their results warrant "careful consideration" from districts that are thinking of making such cuts in an effort to save money.

"The findings of this study suggest that from a societal perspective, the benefits of school nursing services may well exceed the cost for those services," Li Yan Wang told Reuters Health.

She led the research at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Division of Adolescent and School Health in Atlanta, Georgia.

To assess the Massachusetts program, the researchers compared money spent putting full-time nurses in schools with money the program saved by reducing doctors' visits and keeping parents at work and teachers in front of the classroom.

For the 22 types of procedures school nurses performed during the study, from testing blood sugar to administering physical therapy, the researchers calculated how much it would cost to go to a clinic or hospital for the same care.

To measure lost wages for parents, they determined the time parents would have to take off work if children were dismissed early, as well as how often they would have to come to school to help kids take their prescription medications if no nurse was on site.

Finally, to assess teacher productivity, they referred to an earlier study that found teachers spent 20 fewer minutes per day dealing with student health issues once a nurse was assigned to their school.

Massachusetts records showed that during the 2009-2010 school year, about 477,000 students at 933 schools covered by the program received school health services. Paying nurses to provide those services cost $79 million.

The same care provided outside of school would have cost $20 million. In addition, with no school nurses parent productivity losses would have totaled $28.1 million and teacher productivity losses, $129.1 million.

Wang and her colleagues calculated that every dollar invested in the school nurse program saved $2.20 overall, according to the findings published May 19 in JAMA Pediatrics.

Anne Sheetz said those savings are just a start.